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U.S. pulls mission chief from Cuba as tension increases

By George Gedda
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The Reagan administration has withdrawn the chief of its diplomatic mission in Havana in what appears to be part of a steady deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations.

Curt Kamman, a career diplomat, is being reassigned to a State Department post after spending 22 months as head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, a U.S. official said.

The official refused comment on whether Mr. Kamman's reassignment was linked to the strain in U.S.-Cuban relations, but he acknowledged that 22 months is an exceptionally short stay for a chief of mission. No replacement for the 48-year-old diplomat has been named.

According to the official, who asked not to be identified, Cuban authorities informed the Interests Section on Dec. 13 that the United States would no longer be allowed to use charter flights to resupply the mission.

Such flights have routinely been used to send everything from cars to personal mail and construction materials needed for refurbishing the mission.

Cuban authorities served notice of the restriction just three days after President Reagan had appeared on the same platform with Armando Valladares, a former Cuban prisoner who suffered a variety of abuses during his 22-year detention.

The occasion for the joint appearance was the anniversary of the

adoption by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Cuban officials maintain Mr. Valladares is a fraud and is being used by enemies of Cuban President Fidel Castro to discredit the revolution. It was not clear, however, whether the suspension on charter flights was directly related to Mr. Valladares' White House appearance.

Also in December, the Reagan administration reacted angrily when Cuban authorities canceled without explanation a scheduled flight to Miami of a group of former political prisoners and their families.

Another source of irritation to Cuba was a reported overflight of the island by a U.S. spy plane two days before Mr. Valladares' appearance at the White House. The alleged flight riled Cuban authorities, who arranged for a demonstration involving tens of thousands of protestors in front of the Interests Section.

The Reagan administration, consistent with longstanding policy, has neither confirmed nor denied that the spy flight took place.

Another setback to relations occurred two weeks earlier when the United States introduced a resolution in the U.N. General Assembly criticizing Cuba's human rights performance.

At the time, U.N. Ambassador Vernon Walters delivered a speech assailing rights abuses in Cuba.

Mr. Kamman is the fourth American to head the U.S. mission in Havana since it opened in 1977 along with a Cuban mission in Washington. Before that, the two countries had no diplomatic representatives in each other's capital for 16 years.